



Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

Contact: Joshua Lavar Butler, Public Information Officer

Phone: (928) 871-7160

Cell: (928) 255-2946

Fax: (928) 871-7255

joshualavarbutler@navajo.org

joshualavarbutler@yahoo.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Speaker Morgan reassures Navajo people that official travel is necessary

Response to negative media attention

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) would like to reaffirm and reassure the Navajo people that official travel on behalf of the Navajo Nation is necessary in order to continue working relationships with outside entities to the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation government has received widespread criticism for traveling on behalf of the Navajo Nation. The media has painted a negative image of frivolous and wasteful spending by tribal officials in recent months.

Local media reports have also been successful in misconstruing facts in order to present their version of these events, while misinforming the public about tribal government spending.

Speaker Morgan would like to accurately inform the public about the Council's need to travel, in order to continue its ongoing efforts to improve the quality of life for all Navajo people. Navajo representatives find the need to attend meetings on and off the Navajo reservation, in order to conduct official business on behalf of the Nation.

Government spending and expenditures are public information and the Navajo Nation government should be diligent in providing this information to its Navajo people.

The Office of the Speaker strongly encourages and promotes transparency in government. It has always been a priority of the Office of the Speaker to provide information in a diligent manner.

Speaker Morgan has highly encouraged his staff and the Legislative Branch to conduct meetings within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation. In doing this, local Navajo Nation enterprises and businesses will benefit from the revenues generated from hotel accommodations, restaurants, and from conference rental fees. This is done in an effort to promote economic development for existent businesses on the Navajo reservation.

On Nov. 19-20, the Legislative Branch hosted the 21st Navajo Nation Council State Legislative Strategic Planning Session here in Window Rock. This work session brought state representatives from the three states of Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona to the Navajo Nation's capital. This is one example of Speaker Morgan's efforts to promote economic development here on the Navajo Nation.

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This response comes amidst negative media attention regarding meetings in Las Vegas, Nev. Various members of the 21st Navajo Nation Council will be attending several meetings, conferences, and work sessions in Las Vegas this upcoming week of Dec. 10. Several meetings were held last week as well, the week of Dec. 3.

The Las Vegas meetings were scheduled far in advance and most meeting sites are determined by the hosting committees or conference organizers. Travel budgets are also determined far in advance by standing committees.

In October, several Council Delegates attended the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) conference in Hawaii at a cost of \$44,438.74 to represent and support the Navajo Nation on matters related to education.

This total figure was made available three-weeks after the trip and was reported to the Associated Press at the latter part of November. This cost was for 18 Council Delegates and two staff members. This total dollar amount includes the cost for meals, lodging, airline fare, and for conference registration. The Office of the Speaker waited for accurate figures, which resulted in the three-week delay in providing the cost of the trip to Hawaii.

It was initially reported in national media publications that 362-plus Navajo delegates attended this conference, but 18 Council Delegates from the Navajo Nation is a small fraction of total conference attendees sent to Hawaii.

As the legislators of the Navajo Nation, Council Delegates are often required to travel in order to conduct the business of the Navajo Nation and this often guides their need to travel. Travel is often done throughout the Navajo reservation, state-wide, national, and sometimes international.

Navajo Nation Council Delegates are appointed to one or two oversight committees. Committees require that members seek approval for travel. Committee members are able to travel on funds that are budgeted into each individual committee's travel budget for the fiscal year.

The Navajo Nation Council's travel budget is drawn from annual allocations appropriated by the Council, which is done in August of every year. The Office of the Speaker approves all travel authorizations, which are approved by Speaker Morgan. Travel authorizations are necessary for insurance coverage and other work-related incidents.

Travel plays an integral part of the Delegates' professional development, as well as providing them necessary information to carry out their oversight functions.

The focus should be on the positive benefits of networking and developing lasting relationships with outside entities. These are benefits that positively affect the Navajo Nation as a whole.

The conference and meetings that Council Delegates attend, bring together Indian leaders from throughout the country. These conferences and meetings are held to facilitate an exchange of information that is extremely useful in developing policy for program development.

Conference attendees are provided with the opportunity to share concerns, ideas, and to pursue solutions to various issues that affect Native American communities.

Navajo representatives are encouraged to be active participants in conferences that they attend. The Navajo Nation is known for taking leadership

roles in various organizations and this benefits governmental affairs at all levels. Navajo representatives are also encouraged to maximize and advocate interests related the Navajo Nation.

Conference attendees are provided an opportunity to establish professional contacts for their respective committees, which strengthens networking ties for the Navajo Nation.

Speaker Morgan said that “it is very important that our public servants remain actively abreast of national issues that have an impact upon our Nation.”

The U.S. Dept. of Interior is said to be launching an investigation into whether federal money was inappropriately spent for Navajo representatives who participated in the NEIA conference in Hawaii.

Of the 360-plus conference attendees, 18 members are Council Delegates that have justification for their travels to the conference. Council Delegates represented their oversight committees, which often overlap in issues affecting the Navajo Nation.

The Legislative Branch does not have direct control over individual public school districts, BIA schools, and community schools on the Navajo Nation. Each school is responsible for approving and paying for their representatives to attend the conference. The Legislative Branch does not have direct oversight in approving travel for any other branch of government within the Navajo Nation or with any departments under the Executive Branch.

The Navajo Nation is a sovereign nation, which allows the Navajo Nation freedom to make its own decisions.

“The media believes that they should be the ones to dictate how the Navajo Nation should run their own government,” Speaker Morgan said. “The Navajo Nation Council is the governing body.”

“There are critics that have never worked for or have served as leaders of the Navajo Nation,” Speaker Morgan added. “Our Council Delegates are very hard workers for the Navajo Nation and travel is necessary to conduct their business.”

Speaker Morgan added that all activities of the Navajo Nation Council are accomplished and planned within accordance of the laws and policies of the Navajo Nation.”

For more information, contact Joshua Lavar Butler with the Office of the Speaker at 928-871-6384.